

## [On English Clockmaking]

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Albert Bailey

English

Sanford Avenue, Thomaston

formerly employed by Seth Thomas Clock Co. Typed Mr. Bailey has worked at watch and clock making since early manhood, in his native England and in the principal wa?t watch and clock companies of the United States. He was employed by Seth Thomas for almot 48 years.

He said: "When I first came here in 1883, they were working on the model for their Seth Thomas watch and they began to manufacture the watch that same year. They made cheap models, seven jewels, selling for as low as four dollars, and they had them with 23 and 24 and 25 jewels that sold as high as \$25. I've got some of them yet and they're good timepe timepieces, though not many people remember thesd these days that Seth Thomas once made watches.

"Why did they discontinue them? Well, they bought an ? army of estimators here and they went through the factories with a fine tooth comb and when they got all through they convinced the stockholders that the company was losing \$25,000 a year in the watch department.

"So they abandoned the watchmaking end ? of it entirely. Threw a lot of people out of work, and lost a lot of good ? craftsmen. But they found out afterwards that the

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watchmaking had been carrying the clock department. Of course they never would admit it, but it was generally known around town. Naturally they wouldn't admit they'd made a mistake.

“There were more than a hundred workers in the training room alone—thats where I worked at the time. Training? Well, I'd have to take a watch apart to show you exactly. When I repeat words like 'testing endshake' and 'reaming' and so forth it doesn't mean much to an a person not familiar with clockmaking.

“It's a trade yi you can't learn from books. You have to be shown the operations as they are necessary in each step and learn the hard way, from experience ? and trial ? and error. They're There were in my time clock makers so jealous of their knowledge that they'd refuse to pass it 15037 on. Some of them built up reputations in the trade that carried them along all their lives and were able pretty much to establish their own wages—to a reasonable degree of course—and working conditions.

“There were some fine clockmakers and watchmakers employed here in the old days. It was a craft which might be compared in many respects to that of the journeyman printer, except that it wase was even more exclusive.

“I mean by that there were comparatively few places you could go for employment. A good watchmaker, [though?], could get work anywhere watches were made, and sometimes their reputations preceeded them. In my own case, I've worked for all of the bs best, including Elgin, Waltham, and Hamilton, before coming back to Seth Thomas.

“I've worked with men who used to keep a list of watchmakers. They came and went, as I said, just like tramp printers, and you were likely to get a job in Elgin Illinois, or some other watchmaking center, and find yourself working next to a fellow you had known in Thomaston.

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"I worked in Waterbury, too, when they made the old watch with the 11 foot mainspring. It wound around the inside of the case above the movement. We used to fix the case with loosened screws for the benefit of [greenhorns?] and they'd find themself work on them for a few minutes seconds and then find themselves all tangled up in the mainspring.

"I can't tell you a great deal about the clock end of it here, because after watches were discontinued I went to work on bank locks and spent most all of my remaining service with the company on them. We never had names for the movements that I recall except in the case of the old cheap alarm they called a " 'Echo' and their there may have been other isolated instances like that. All the watches went by model numbers."

Julius Keller

Yankee

Center Street Thomaston, employed by Seth Thomas Clock Co. for 53 years. Said Mr. Keller:

"I get the general idea ofwh of what you're driving at young fellow, but I'm afraid I can't help you much. It's too bad, but much of that stuff gets lost in the shuffle with the passing of time. But y You spoke about old Tom [Woodruff?] and some of the other company executives of bygone days and I'll give you another story about him to add to your collection.

"Tom was a crusty old codger, as you may have gathered, and though he didn't like it much he used to guide parties of visitors through the plant, explaining the various operations to them enroute.

"One day he had a party in tow which included several young ladies. He got pretty close to my bench and he was explaining the regulation of the movements in great detail, ? elaborating in answer to questions on the fly an essential pary part of clock regulation.

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He'd got all through and was evidently pretty proud of himself when one of the young ladies in the Party piped up:

“But Mr Woodruff, what's the fly for?” Tom looked at her with that famous scowl of his. “The fly?” he ? says, “Why, young lady, that's used to blow to blow the dust out of the clock.”

“Tom was president about the time ? there began to be an influx of foreign workmen. Ed Bradstreet wass was superintendent of the Marine shop then and I remember one of the foreigners had worked there for several months and he thought he wase was entitled to more money. He couldn't speak very good English, so he asked one of the boys just how to approach ed Ed.

“Go ask him for raisins,” he was told. So down he goes and says to Ed, “Mr Bradstreet, I like raisins, please.” Ed looked at him, puzzled, but he was a kindO kind-hearted man. “All right,” says he, “I'll see that you get 'em.” So that afternoon he sent up a box of raisins. It was a week before the poor foreing foreigner could figure it out.

“I used to have a scrap book with some stuff that might be of interest to you, but it got lost or mislaid. Some of the rest of them ? could probably be more help—my memory's not so good.”

George Richmond

Litchfield street

Seth Thomas Clock Co. English parentage F Donovan 286 N Main St. Thomaston ( This man has been employed by Seth Thomas for approximately 55 years, working during that time mainly in the assembly room. His job has been the weighing and testing of mainsprings of various sizes and his work has also included oiling and greasing. His main interest in life, speaking in an occupational sense of course, has been clocks and he

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is thoroughly imbued with the old fashioned, mid-Victorian ideas regarding the industry and how it should be conducted. ) “Were the old-fashioned clocks better?” (said he) “I should say they were. Why we used to make clocks for the foreign trade. They could make 'em cheaper in this country than they could abroad, though that may be hard to believe, considring considering differences in wages and all. Now they wa'n't a foreign-made clock could touch 'em for performance and ? endurance.

“Here's something may interest you. It happened when Aaron Thomas was superintendent of the plant and if you don't believe me you can ask any of the other old timers, they'll tell you the same story.

“Seems Aaron took a trip to Paris where thy they was holding a big expsit exposition. And of course what interested Aaron the most was the clock show. He was a business man and he always had an eye to business.

“Aaron saw a likely looking clock there with a foreign label and he went and bought it, said by Judas ? he'd find out what made them tick over in ? Europe. So when he got it home, he ? brought it down to the office and called all the big fellows around and he said: 'Now, boys, we'll see how they make a clock over in Europe and whether they be any better than ours.'

“Well sir, when they got the dial off, there was the Seth Thomas name on the plates as big as life. Those foreign clock makers know a 2 good clock when they see one.

“How come they could make 'em ? cheaper? Well, for one thing brass was cheaper in this country. They took more pains with those foreign clocks, too; made 'em better than the ones they produced for the home trade, though you couldn't call any of 'em poor quality by a long shot.

“They made 'em better all around than they do today. They've cut down on everything, made the metal thinner, made the frames thinner. cheapened the product all along the

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lines. Then you've got your machines. whey Why they just can't make the same quality clock by machines as they could by hand. Nossir, hand work was far superior. Another angle you've got to consider is the speeding up of the workers. They don't get a chance to put time enough on a job to make sure it's done right. So the product suffers in the end.”

(He is ? referring to an adaptation of the so-called Bedaux, or B system in effect at Seth Thomas, under which work in every department has been speeded up to an extent considered by many detrimental to the finished product. There is likewise a great deal of discontent among the help since the institution of this system.)

“Names? We ?? never called any of the movements by any particular name in the old days, unless it was one of the standard kind you never hear in Sunday school. No, they went by numbers until they got in the case, and even then we didn't always know their names. The help wa'n't supposed to know anything about 'em except how to make 'em. But these days they got names for some of ? them. The ship bell movements, for instance, they've named after Naval heroes. There's one called 'The Admiral Dewey'.

“Only man I ever knew much for calling names was Henry ————. Henry was an ear-timer, left the company now, and he's still working at his trade, in Ingraham's I believe, he had some pet names for some of the movements and they wasn't complimentary. But ear-timing is likely to develop any 3 queer streak a man may have.”

(Ear timing is a process which seems to be on the way out in clock manufacture. It has been abolished at Seth Thomas, though still a part of the clockmaking routine as at Ingraham's. Ear-timers must regulate a clock with the use of a metronome, depending, as the name implies, upon their sense of hearing to ? synchronize the movement with the metronome beat. There seems to be a prevalent impression among clockmakers here that ear-timing as Mr. Richmond implied, is likely to develop eccentricities. Because of the tension under which ? ear-timers work day in and day out, many of them become hard drinkers also, according to popular belief. This impression is the nearest approach to a

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superstition brought to light during the conversation with Mr Richmond. It may have basis in fact, or it may be that its widespread acceptance, has in some cases actually have ? been an evil influence upon credulous ? ear-timers. Because of the difficulty of training men for this phase of clock making ear-timing has been one of the highest paid jobs in the industry, with wages reported authentically of as high as one dollar per hour (hour piecework.)